



BILL MURRAY SAYS HE WAS TRICKED INTO STARRING 'GHOSTBUSTERS II'
pg 08

ADDICTION HAS PLOUGHED THROUGH GENERATIONS, BUT STILL REMAINS LARGELY UNADDRESSED
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KATRINA KAIF TESTS POSITIVE FOR COVID-19
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Summit TIMES

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ON TOP OF THE NEWS

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31 new cases, 14 of whom are from TNA containment zone

SUMMIT REPORT GANGTOK, 07 APR:

The active case count of novel coronavirus in Sikkim jumped to 95 today with 31 new cases being reported in the last 24 hours.

Among the 31 new cases, 14 are primary contacts of the student from Tashi Namgyal Academy who had tested positive for COVID-19 recently.

Reassuringly, even though the number 14 sounds big, when taken in context, it is not as alarming as some would project it to be. These 14 cases were detected from the screening of 123 primary contacts at the school and comprise

11 students and three staff members. The 14 are either hostellers or engaged in the mess hall.

In his daily health bulletin on Wednesday, Health Department State IEC Officer, Sonam Gyaltzen Bhutia, informed that the 31 new cases were detected in the testing of 349 samples on Tuesday.

Among the new cases reported from in and around the capital, Mr Bhutia informed that a person from Arithang, two from Sichey, one from Bahai School Road [Tadong], one from Phewa Basti [Tadong], one from Lingding [presently in Siliguri], one from Pani House

[Deorali] and one from Kazi Road were found positive for COVID.

Likewise, samples of a person from Chongey and one from Ranipool in East District and one from Daragaon [Tem] and one from Chuba Perbing in South District and one from Dentam in West District and one from Rangrang in North District were tested positive for COVID-19.

Mr Bhutia also informed that a six-year-old child from Reshitang has also tested positive for COVID-19 but his parents could not be contacted over the given phone number and urged them to immedi-

ately contact back to concerned authority.

He added that a tourist from Gujarat also tested positive and has since returned home.

In the meanwhile, the State registered just one new recovery to take the figure of recovered cases of COVID-19 in Sikkim to 5,978. Sikkim's tally of the confirmed cases of COVID-19 currently stands at 6,317.

On the other hand, 6,702 persons were vaccinated in different parts of the State on Tuesday, of whom 6,306 persons received the first shot and 396 persons completed their vaccine schedule with the second

dose.

While giving details of the district-wise vaccination, Mr Bhutia informed that 2,688 persons [2,486 first dose & 202 second dose] in East District, 966 persons [897 first dose and 69 second dose] in West District and 3048 persons [2923 first dose and 125 second dose] in South District were vaccinated for COVID-19. In category-wise vaccinations, 21 healthcare workers, 311 frontline workers and 6370 persons in age group of 45 years & above received vaccines in the State.

CM calls on MoS Power, submits memorandum



SUMMIT REPORT GANGTOK, 07 APR:

Chief Minister, Prem Singh Tamang submitted a Memorandum to the Minister of State (Independent Charge) of Power, RK Singh, "to make Sikkim a developed and efficient electricity provider to its consumers through green energy within the State and to consumers outside the State as well".

The CM called on the Minister of State (Independent Charge) of Power, New & Renewable Energy, Govt. of India, RK Singh, in New Delhi, today.

In a press release issued by the Secretary to the CM, SD Dhakal, it is informed that the Chief Minister also requested for the consideration by the power purchasers of other States to fulfil the Hydro power Purchase Obligation and also discussed the evacuation system for direct withdrawal of free share of power from the State Independent Power Producer (IPP) projects including Teesta Stage III Hydro Electricity Project.

Provisions for prepaid smart me-

ter system was also discussed in the meeting for which the Chief Minister requested for 90% grant to the State for completing installation of prepaid smart meters.

In regards to the solar renewable purchase obligation, the Chief Minister offered a vacant land for the installation of 1 (one) megawatt at Pakyong, East Sikkim and requested the Minister to provide special assistance from the Government of India. He also requested for the cancellation of Power Purchase Agreement (PPA) and withdrawal of all thermal power which in spite of generating surplus green energy is not profiting the state.

The Chief Minister was accompanied by the Minister for Energy & Power, Govt. of Sikkim, M.N. Sherpa and the senior officers of the Ministry of Power, New & Renewable Energy, Govt. of India. "The meeting was very fruitful as the Union Minister of State (I/C) has assured that all the points discussed will be looked into at the earliest," the release states.

GOLAY MEETS GADKARI IN NEW DELHI

CM proposes alternate highway from Kali Jhora to Rangpo

SUMMIT REPORT GANGTOK, 07 APR:

Chief Minister, PS Tamang proposed the construction of an alternate National Highway from Kali Jhora to Rangpo in a meeting with Union Minister of Road Transport and Highways, Nitin Gadkari, in New Delhi, today.

A press release from the Secretary to CM, SD Dhakal informs that the CM discussed various issues relating to road connectivity in the State and alternate National Highway between Sikkim and West Bengal.

He proposed for the construction of National Highway from Kali Jhora to Rangpo, West Bengal-Sikkim border via Mon-song, 17th Mile Kalimpong, 12th Mile Alpert Villa, Ralli, Khani, Shinji, Samalbong, Samthar and Pampu joining Kalijhora on the National Highway.

He also requested for the



alternate National Highway between Melli and Singtam in the Sikkim side for which the project proposal is already submitted to the Ministry.

He also highlighted the need for improving Indira Bypass, Manpur-Nayabazaar-Legship Road, Gangtok-Tashi View Point, Rangpo-Pachak-Mam-jay-Dickling to Pakyong Airport to be declared as Nation-

al Highway.

Another highlight of the meeting was the 134 km road connecting Naya Bazaar-Daramdin-Soreng-Kaluk-Dentam-Uttarey to Chiwabhanjyang for improvement as well as declaring it a National Highway. This road touches Chiwabhanjyang on the western part of the State with Nepal which will be an im-

portant route for tourism and business purposes, the release mentions.

Further, the Ranipul - Gangtok Bypass Road via Sajong (Rumtek) connecting Burtuk which was under construction since 2010 is now abandoned because of the midway termination of the contract.

"This being a very important bypass connecting Upper Burtuk will ease the traffic congestion in the present National Highway and lead to seamless access to Nathula (Indo-China Border). The Chief Minister requested for the completion of the balance work for which Government of Sikkim has already submitted the proposal," the release states.

The Union Minister has taken note of all the proposals and directed the officials to initiate the activities on the subject raised by the Chief Minister.

South takes stock of Covid vaccination; Will keep vaccination sites open on holidays



NAMCHI, 07 APR [IPR]: The District Task Force on Immunization met in the office of the District Collector, South, here on 06 April under the chairmanship of DC-South, M Bharani Kumar.

The meeting was attended by CMO (South), Dr DC Sharma, DSO (South), Dr Urjen Sherpa, DRCHO (South), Dr Junita Yonzon from District Hospital Namchi along with officials from other Line departments.

DRCHO (South), Dr Junita Yonzon briefed the house on the Covid-19 vaccination status of South including vaccine beneficiary coverage, stock position of vaccines and the vaccination plan for South District.

Till date a total of 14,442 beneficiaries have successfully been vaccinated with their 1st dose and 1,812 persons vaccinated with their 2nd dose of the Covid-19

vaccine in South District. The total number of 16,254 beneficiaries vaccinated included health workers, frontline workers, ASHAs, AWWs, comorbid persons and persons aged 60+.

DC South M Bharani Kumar directed the officials from District Hospital Namchi to conduct vaccination sessions daily. He has assured to deploy additional police personnel at the Vac-

cination site to ensure compliance of Covid-19 protocol and crowd management. He also assured to provide chairs for the observation room and directives were given for the same to be provided the next day at the vaccination site.

Message & appeal to the public:

District Hospital and PHCs will be conducting Covid-19 vaccination on all days including gazetted

government holidays. Kindly follow Covid-19 protocol at all times.

Summit TIMES IN NEPALI

Watch our Nepali news broadcast every evening on Facebook at the Summit Times Daily Page. Please like, Share, Comment and let us know how we can improve. Thank You

ITDP India Programme **Smart City** **Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs** **Government of India** **FIT INDIA** **THE NEW VISION OF LIFE**

GANGTOK Streets for People CHALLENGE

The Streets for People Challenge is an initiative of the Smart Cities Mission, Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs (MoHUA), Government of India, to inspire cities to create walking-friendly streets through quick measures, in response to COVID-19.

The city-led Design Competition aims to crowd source innovative ideas for designing and testing the pilot interventions through quick, low-cost, and innovative solutions.

Who can participate?

Site 1: Flagship project Site 2: Neighbourhood level

For Both:

1st Prize: Rs.10,000 2nd Prize: Rs 7,500 3rd Prize: Rs. 5,000

Professionals Students Multi-disciplinary collaborations

FOR MORE DETAILS VISIT: <http://smartnet.niua.org/indiastreetchallenge/competition/>

Competition roll-out: 5th April 2021

Registration closes: 12th April 2021

Walking Audit: 13th April 2021

Submission by 11:59 pm IST: 25th April 2021

Announcing of results: 27th April 2021

BJP observes 41st Foundation Day at Chalamthang

SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 07 APR:

The 41st Foundation Day of the Bharatiya Janata Party was observed in South Sikkim's Chalamthang State Party Office today, a press release informs.

The programme was organised at the constituency level, Temi Namphing Constituency Mandaliya In-charge, Bhupen Giri was present as the chief guest of the day. Mr Giri,



BJP State Level, general secretary, Kishan Morcha, and Bikash Pradhan addressed the function. Kisaan Mor-

cha vice president, PT Bhutia and Mandaliya In-charge, Shiv Kumar Sharma also addressed the program.

The program ended with vote of thanks from state level social media convenor, Tilak Khatiwada.

Sanju Football Academy executive body meets

SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 07 APR:

Executive body meeting of Sanju Football Academy was held at Roadhouse Restro and Bar at Sombaria, West Sikkim, on Monday, a press release informs. The proprietor of the restaurant, Binod Chettri is the Advisor of Sanju Football Academy.

Indian International Footballer, Sanju Pradhan who is the Mentor of the Academy was also present during the meeting along with other Executive Members like the Advisors- Lakpa Dorjee Sherpa, Binod Chettri, President, Gagan Subba, General Secretary, TM Limboo,

Treasurer, Prawash Shiwa, Vice President, Karma Zigmee, Joint Secretary, Mayank Chandak and Head Coach, Bhaskar Limboo.

The meeting decided



to add more members to the Academy's Executive Body, following that agreement, Vice President, Karma Zigmee, Advisor, Anil Kumar Gupta, Joint Secretary, Mayank Chandak Publicity Secretary, Saroj Subba were appointed along with Saurabh Rai (Chamling) as the Academy Manager.

Some important decisions were also taken like requesting the Chief Minister, PS Tamang for a Public Ground in Som-

baria. Soon a delegation will seek an appointment in this regard with the Chief Minister.

The meeting also discussed the establishment of a hostel in the near future and tie up with a private school in Sombaria for hostel accommodation for trainees for the time being.

Constituency level membership drive to be undertaken was also discussed along with sending of senior play-

ers of the Academy for AIFF D license course. Blood donation camp, Baby League and a constituency level football tournament where the matches will be held during weekends were also discussed.

Sanju Pradhan thanked all the members for attending the meeting and also helping out with the day-to-day running of the Academy which is not possible without the support of all the members, he added.

Union Ministry of Road Transport donates 3 ambulances for Sikkim

NEW DELHI, 07 APR: Union Minister for Road Transport and Highways, Nitin Gadkari, handed over three basic care ambulances to Sikkim.

NHIDCL has procured these ambulances fitted with basic care appliances, medicines and the ambulances will be providing services to road accident victims and act as quick response tools for road mishaps.

On behalf of the Sikkim Government, Special Resident Commissioner, Monalisa Dash, received the keys for the said



ambulances which were handed over to the Chief Minister in New Delhi today, a press release from the Chief Minister's Office informs.

Covid surge hit children hard, 79,688 infected in 5 states since March

NEW DELHI, 07 APR [NDTV]: The second wave of Covid, in which the numbers are skyrocketing, is hitting younger people and children - unlike the first round when the elderly, and those with co-morbidities were seen to the most vulnerable sections. Data from the Union health ministry shows 79,688 children have been infected in the five states affected worst by the virus.

Currently there is no vaccine for children. A testing of AstraZeneca

vaccine of children in the UK has been suspended over reports of the vaccine being linked to blood clotting, which has led to seven deaths in the European nation.

In Maharashtra, 60,684 children have been infected with Covid between 1 March and 4 April. Of these children, 9,882 are under the age of five years.

In Chhattisgarh, 5,940 children have been infected by the disease - 922 of them are below

the age of five. In Karnataka, the corresponding figures are 7,327 and 871. In Uttar Pradesh, 3,004 children have been infected and 471 among them are below the age of five.

A doctor in Delhi's Ram Manohar Lohia hospital has said the national capital is seeing a similar situation. Health ministry figures show Delhi logged 2,733 infections among children, 441 of them below the age of five years.

Public health experts are of the view that the

weaker immunity in children, coupled with a lack of Covid-appropriate behaviour, could be the reason for the spike. There is also the fact that new virus mutants are highly transmissible, and are turning into super-spreaders.

Over the last 24 hours, India recorded an all-time high of 1,15,736 fresh cases and 630 fatalities. This was the second time within three days that the country logged more than 1 lakh cases over a 24-hour period.

Vaccine doses in Maharashtra to last only 3 days: Tope

MUMBAI, APR 7 (PTI): Maharashtra Health Minister Rajesh Tope on Wednesday said the state has 14 lakh doses of COVID-19 vaccine which would last only three days, and many inoculation centres were being closed due to the shortage of the vaccine.

Talking to reporters here, Tope said people coming to such centres for taking jabs were being sent back as there was no supply of vaccine doses.

"Fourteen lakh doses are available now which would last three days. We need 40 lakh vaccine doses every week. We can then administer six lakh doses every day in a week. The doses we are getting are not enough," he said.

Tope said the state government was earlier vaccinating four lakh people in a day.

"We accepted the challenge from the Centre to expedite the vaccination drive to six lakh per day. Now, we were vaccinating nearly 5 lakh people in a day," he said.

The minister urged the Centre to give priority to Maharashtra, since the coronavirus cases were more in the state and the overall death toll was over 50,000.

"Most of those infected now are in the age group of 25 to 40 years,"



he said.

There is an urgent need to control the viral infection by increasing the immunity level of people and creating antibodies, Tope said.

He also urged the National Centre for Disease Control to inform the states if the present infection spread is because of a new mutant strain of the virus.

"If that is the case, please tell us what is the course of medication," he said.

Earlier in the day, state principle secretary (health) Pradeep Vyas told PTI that several districts in Maharashtra will run out of the COVID-19 vaccine stock "today or tomorrow" and the Centre has been informed about it.

Maharashtra can easily administer five lakh vaccine doses in a day if there is a clarity on schedule and availability, the official said.

Tope said about 1,200 metric tonne oxygen is being manufactured in the state every day and the daily consumption is 700 metric tonne, of

which 80 per cent is for medical use.

The minister said he has urged the Centre to direct neighbouring states to facilitate oxygen supply to Maharashtra.

Tope also asked all private doctors not to prescribe Remdesivir injections irrationally to hike the bills of COVID-19 patients, and that they should also follow the central government's guidelines on the use of the medicine.

He said Maharashtra has followed the '3T' (testing, tracing and treatment) principles strictly and taken all steps to ensure COVID-appropriate behaviour by imposing prohibitory orders and night curfew to stop crowding.

Nearly 82 lakh people have been vaccinated so far in Maharashtra since the roll-out of the inoculation drive.

An official statement on Tuesday said Maharashtra had received 1.06 crore doses of the COVID-19 vaccine, out of which 88

lakh doses have been used while the wastage stood at three per cent.

It said the state government will vigorously pursue its demand for more stock of vaccine doses, considering the rapid rise in the COVID-19 cases and expansion of the vaccination drive.

Chief Minister Udhav Thackeray on Monday requested Prime Minister Narendra Modi to allow people above 25 years to receive COVID-19 shots, which he said will protect the young people from the rapid spread of the viral infection at a time when they are stepping outside their homes to earn a livelihood.

In a letter to the PM, Thackeray also demanded that Maharashtra be provided 1.5 crore additional doses of vaccines, which will enable the state government to complete within three weeks the vaccination of beneficiaries above 45 years of age in six districts, including Mumbai.

RDD Minister makes surprise visit to Jorethang store



GANGTOK, 07 APR [IPR]: Minister for Rural Development Department, Sonam Lama made a surprise visit to the RDD store at Jorethang today. During the visit, the

Minister took stock of the store and enquired about the materials in stock and their quality.

He interacted with the officers and staff

present there and obtained the details of services being provided by the Department from the store.

He also interacted with the visitors and

local public who had come over to the store to collect materials and assured that more qualitative facility would be made available in the store in near future.

To solves problems of the Hills, vote BJP, Adityanath's call at Kurseong

SMRITA KHAWAS
KURSEONG, 07 APR:

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister, Yogi Adityanath, was accorded an extravagant reception to the Darjeeling Hills today as he arrived here to campaign for the BJP candidate BP Bajgain who is being supported by the GNLF.

Addressing a joint public meeting here at Kurseong, the UP CM played to the gallery and accused the Congress, CPI[M] and TMC governments of having consistently denied the Hills and the Hill people their rights and keeping them out of the developmental loop.

The BJP, by contrast, he said, believed in giving justice to all the people.

Interestingly, in this regard he drew attention of the audience to the BJP Government's abrogation of Article 370 in Jammu & Kashmir and bringing the situation there to "normal" even as opening it to the rest of the country.



"We all know Jammu and Kashmir was one of the most sensitive areas where terrorist attacks were frequent but today all the problems of Jammu and Kashmir are solved and if a Darjeeling resident wants to buy land, s/he can do so now in Jammu & Kashmir," he said, adding, "In the past, this privilege was taken away by the Congress and today our PM Modi has returned this privilege to everyone of us."

"And with this election, we want to clear a path to solve all the problems of West Bengal along with Darjeeling, Kurseong, Kalimpong, Tarai and Dooars," he said.

He claimed that the

Darjeeling MP, Raju Bista, was doing his best in Parliament to address the issues of the Hills and if the people sent a BJP MLA from the region, the Hills will benefit from a "Double Engine" government.

The Kurseong meet was also attended by the Darjeeling MP Raju Bista, GNLF president Maan Ghising, CPRM president RB Rai, and the party's Assembly election candidate, BP Bajgain.

He also assured that a BJP government in West Bengal will focus on tourism in Darjeeling and improve it to the level it has potential for and ensure that the Hill people benefit the most from it.

"We have to work together to make our

dream of Sonar Bangla come true and our big-dream of Ek Bharat-Shreshth Bharat and make our country one of the biggest powers of the world," the UP CM appealed.

The MP meanwhile reminded the people that whichever GJM they support, the votes will be going to the TMC and with that the dream of a permanent political solution for the Gorkhas will go further away.

As for the fears that the BJP will push the NRC on the Hills, he assured that before the NRC was implemented in the Darjeeling Hills, everyone here will be getting their Praja-patta [land rights].

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ANTHEYSTHI KRIYA



Smt Jas Hang Subba W/O Late Bir Hang Subba R/O Upper Singithang Below Namchi Fire Station has left for her heavenly abode on 5/4/21. The bereaved family deeply thankful to those who graced the final rites and would request your presence for antheistri kriya falling on 13th April 2021 in residence at namchi singithang.

Mr. Maniraj subba, Kumar Subba, Bharat Subba, Amber Singh Subba, Mrs Sarita Subba (Daughter) and Bijoy Subba (Son in law)

Salghari sec school wins inter school debate in Tamang language

SURAJ LIMBOO

GANGTOK, 07 APR:

Salghari Secondary School won the inter-school debate competition in Tamang language organized by Sikkim Akademi in association with Language section of Education Department today at the mini hall of Manan Kendra. Padmashree Sanu Lama Tamang was the chief guest of the finals today.

Salghari Secondary School defeated Maniram Secondary school in the finals which was held on the topic 'Only the use of Mother tongue in education can ensure all-round development'.



Interestingly, Phurmit Lepcha of Maniram school was declared best speaker of the competition.

Addressing the gathering, chief guest Sanu Lama said this kind of debate in regional language is a historic initiative taken

by Sikkim Akademi. "I appreciate the Sikkim Akademi's President S.R Subba and his team and I wish this kind of

programme will continue in future also," he stated.

Further, he added that preservation of our language is important and urged the youth to play a vital role in preservation of every regional language.

President of Sikkim Akademi, SR Subba said this is just a beginning of their activities and such debates will be organized in other regional languages in the days to come with the support of the Language section of the Education Department.

Both the winner and runner-up schools were presented trophies along with cash prizes.

Inputs provided to new orchid growers



GANGTOK, 07 APR [PIB]: New orchid growers of Basilakha were supplied with inputs under Tribal Sub-Plan (TSP) during a programme organized at Basilakha by ICAR-NRC for Orchids, Pakyong today.

The beneficiaries were supplied with 200 micron polyshets and 50% shade nets.

For commercial cultivation of orchids, the same beneficiaries were trained by ICAR-NRCO.

10 beneficiaries from Basilakha received the materials.

Nodal Officer (TSP), Dr Siddhartha Sankar Biswas and Co-Nodal officer (TSP), Kalaivanan, NS co-ordinated the programme. They also had a good interaction with the farmers and discussed about commercially viable orchid cultivation.

Lingee School observes World Health Day

SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 07 APR:

Government Senior Secondary School Lingee, South Sikkim, observed World Health Day in the school assembly ground today by conducting physical exercises, quizzes and awareness cum motivational speeches on maintaining good health, a press release informs.

State Kabaddi player, Smile Tamang (XII) con-

ducted physical exercises while Arun Pradhan (XII) and Lakit Lepcha (XII) delivered speech on the topic 'Healthy life and importance of health in our life'.

Chungmit Lepcha (XII) conducted open quiz for the students. Principal Prahlad Sharma talked on good habits, healthy food, regular exercise and positive thinking for maintaining health and well-being.

He encouraged the school children to avoid substance abuse and unhealthy food.

Today's World Health Day Programme was organised by Red Ribbon Club under the guidance of Nodal Teacher, Kulshila Sharma GT Arts, and hosted by Anthony Narzari (XII). The programme was attended by Principal, staff and students of the School.



India reports 1,15,736 new Covid-19 infections

NEW DELHI, 07 APR [REUTERS]: India's second wave of coronavirus infections continued to swell as the country reported a record 115,736 new cases on Wednesday, data from the health ministry showed, as the worst-hit states battled to contain the spread of the virus.

The total number of cases since the first recorded infection in India just over a year ago now stands at 12.8 million, making it the third worst-hit country after the United State and Brazil.

Deaths rose by 630 - the most in four days - to 166,177.

Ominously, the daily increase has topped 100,000 twice this week.

The only other country to post such numbers has been the United States.

Daily infections have also passed the peak of the epidemic's first wave, seen in September.

And as the second wave gathered momentum, authorities in many states have ordered new local lockdowns and other curbs to control the spread of the virus, some of whose variants have become more infectious.

"The pandemic isn't over and there is no scope for complacency," Health Minister Harsh Vardhan said on Twitter, urging people to get "vaccinated on your turn and follow Covid-appropriate behaviour scrupulously!"

But many states have

criticised the federal government as India, the world's biggest vaccine maker, has restricted its immunisation drive to front-line workers and people aged over 45 years.

States like Odisha have also flagged short-

ages of supplies even for the prioritised groups.

India has so far administered about 85 million doses to 75 million of its 1.35 billion people.

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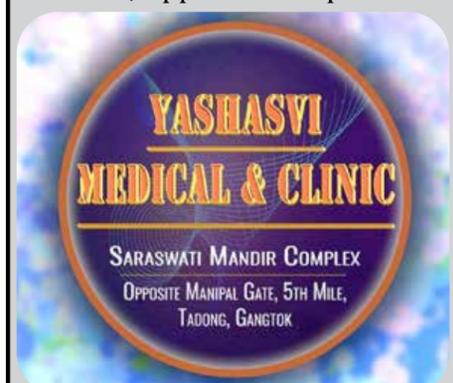
ages of supplies even for the prioritised groups.

India has so far ad-

ministered about 85 million doses to 75 million

of its 1.35 billion people.

YASHASVI MEDICAL & CLINIC,
5th Mile, Opposite Manipal Gate.



NEW CLINIC TIMING.

Doctor Available: (Monday- Saturday)

1. General Physician: 7 AM-9AM,
2. OBG & Gynecologist: 9-10AM.
3. Pediatrician: 8:30-9:30 AM.
4. Skin Specialist: 5-7PM.
5. Orthopaedic : 5-7 PM.
6. Cardio Specialist: 4-6PM.
7. Medicine (Gastrointestinal Specialist) :5-6PM.



सं. 1264] नई दिल्ली, बुधवार, मार्च 26, 2021/बैत्र 5, 1943
No. 1264] NEW DELHI, FRIDAY, MARCH 26, 2021/CHAITRA 5, 1943

असाधारण
EXTRAORDINARY
भाग II—खण्ड 3—उप-खण्ड (ii)
PART II—Section 3—Sub-section (ii)
प्राधिकार से प्रकाशित
PUBLISHED BY AUTHORITY

MINISTRY OF ROAD TRANSPORT AND HIGHWAYS

CORRIGENDUM

New Delhi, the 26th March, 2021

S.O. 1368(E).—In exercise of powers conferred by sub-section (1) of section 3A of the National Highways Act, 1956 (48 of 1956) (hereinafter referred to as the said Act), the Central Government, after being satisfied that for the public purpose, the land, the brief description of which is given in the Schedule below, is required for building (widening/two lane with paved shoulder/four laning etc.), maintenance, management and operation of NH 510 in the stretch of land from Km 75.000 to Km 90.210 (District Collectorate, West Sikkim) in the district of WEST DISTRICT in the state of SIKKIM, hereby declares its intention to acquire such land.

Any person interested in the said land may, within twenty-one days from the date of publication of this notification in the Official Gazette, object to the use of such land for the aforesaid purpose under sub-section(1) of section 3C of the said Act.

Every such objection shall be made to the Competent Authority, namely, District Collector in writing and shall set out the grounds thereof and the Competent Authority shall give the objector an opportunity of being heard, either in person or by a legal practitioner, and may, after hearing all such objections and after making such further enquiry, if any, as the Competent Authority thinks necessary, by order, either allow or disallow the objections.

Any order made by the Competent Authority under sub-section (2) of section 3C of the said Act shall be final.

The land plans and other details of the land to be acquired under their notification are available and can be inspected by the interested person at the aforesaid office of the Competent Authority.

SCHEDULE

Brief Description of the land to be acquired with or without structures falling NH 510 in the stretch of land from Km 75.000 to Km 90.210 NH 510 (District Collectorate, West Sikkim) in the district of WEST DISTRICT in the state of SIKKIM

Rectification in "3(A)"-Gazette Notification Bearing S.O. No. 4389 (E) dated 4th Dec 2020.

In "3(A)" Notification Bearing S.O. No. 4389 (E) dated 4th Dec 2020, published on News paper on 31st Dec 2020. Some corrections have been made in authenticated land details for 3(D).

1. In 3(A) Gazette Notification S.O. No. 4389, 17 Plot no. /Survey no. are not matched with verified and authenticated land details for 3(D). Corrected land details are to be read as follows:-

Change with respect to Plot No./Survey No.					
Sl.No.	Sl. No as per "3(A)" Notification [S.O. No. 4389 (E)] dated 4th Dec 2020.	Plot No./Survey No. as per "3(A)" Notification S.O. No. 4389 (E) dated 4th Dec 2020	Corrected Plot No./Survey No. as per Authenticated land details	Name of Village as per "3(A)" Notification Bearing S.O. No. 4389 (E) dated 4 th Dec 2020	Remarks
1	34	614/1003	614	Lungzik	
2	44	207	207/2361	Lingchom	
3	77	321,321/1791	321	Lingchom	
4	78	321,321/1791	321/1791	Lingchom	
5	126	665,664	664	Lingchom	
6	41	1383,1383/1341	1383,1383/1941	Lingchom	
7	58	652,653	653/965	Tikjek	
8	134	782	772	Tikjek	
9	21	569	569,568	Tikjek	
10	22	569	569,568	Tikjek	
11	35	582/583	582	Tikjek	
12	36	582/583	582	Tikjek	
13	47	620	620/940	Tikjek	
14	48	620	620/940	Tikjek	
15	110	747/1253	467	Tikjek	
16	111	747/1253	468	Tikjek	
17	21	1351,1344/3038	1344/3036	Yangthang	

2. In 3(A) Gazette Notification S.O. No. 4389, 4 Plot land category are not matched with verified and authenticated land details for 3(D). Corrected land details are to be read as follows:-

Sl.No.	Sl. No as per "3(A)" Notification [S.O. No. 4389 (E)] dated 4th Dec 2020.	Plot No./Survey No. as per "3(A)" Notification S.O. No. 4389 (E) dated 4th Dec 2020	Land Type as per "3(A)" Notification Bearing S.O. No. 4389 (E) dated 4th Dec 2020	Corrected Land Type as per Authenticated land details	Name of Village as per "3(A)" Notification Bearing S.O. No. 4389 (E) dated 4 th Dec 2020
1	11	1335,1337	Government	Private	Yangthang
2	12	1335,1337	Government	Private	Yangthang
3	17	1347	Government	Private	Yangthang
4	18	1347	Government	Private	Yangthang

3. In 3(A) Gazette Notification S.O. No. 4389, 4 No's of plot have been reflected in another village under which it does not fall with verified and authenticated land details for 3(D). Corrected land details are to be read as follows:-

Sl. No.	Sl. No as per "3(A)" Notification [S.O. No. 4389 (E)] dated 4th Dec 2020.	Plot No./Survey No. as per "3(A)" Notification S.O. No. 4389 (E) dated 4th Dec 2020	Village Name as per "3(A)" Notification S.O. No. 4389 (E) dated 4th Dec 2020	Corrected Village Name as per Authenticated land details	Remarks
1	91	566	Lingchom	Sardung	
2	92	566	Lingchom	Sardung	
3	101	587	Lingchom	Sardung	
4	102	587	Lingchom	Sardung	

[F. No. NHIDCL/PMU-Gyalshing/NH-510/PKG-VI/2020-21/3A Corr.]

R.O No. 10/IPR/Pub/Class./21-22, Dated: 07.04.21

RAJESH GUPTA, Director

Stoned?

Addiction has ploughed through generations, but still remains largely unaddressed

Sikkim has been grappling with substance abuse for a while now, for a very long while. Unfortunately, much remains to be understood about this malaise in Sikkim even though it has already struck very deep roots here. A beginning was made little over a decade ago when recovering addicts and socially responsible few got together to open the State's first rehabilitation centre for convalescing victims of substance abuse. A few years later, the State Government responded to the crying need for effective laws to deal with the nature of addiction in Sikkim and gave the State the Sikkim Anti-Drugs Act in 2006. This Act, as a special report in this edition details, when it became a law, lost most of its compassion and has become problem in itself. On a brighter note though, the recovering users have become a more organised collectif and make up for societal ennui with their commitment and passion to help others still struggling with chemical dependency. In the absence of any other silver linings, one hopes that their initiatives continue further.

As for the rest of the State, before Sikkim can progress any further with combating drug abuse, it will first have to understand the fundamental and essential questions about drug abuse and addiction, which range from understanding how drugs act on the brain; to identifying and minimizing the role that stress can play in drug use and relapse; to detecting and responding to emerging drug use trends. It should also be understood that addiction is not a "high-society" affliction even though police action might be limited to the economically underprivileged. Take a look around and you can easily spot the nervous stutter of a habituated substance abuser in the most unlikely of places, but before one starts stereotyping addiction, accept it that it is dangerously widespread in Sikkim. A senior politician recently remarked that the Sikkim society has come to a stage where parents are known to buy their teenaged child a 'quarter' every evening in hopes that it will keep him off the harder stuff. This definitely is not the way to rehabilitation. So poorly are even literate parents informed on addiction that they fail to understand that the dependence is chemical and requires professional help after a certain stage. They can at best provide the cushion, the support base that a recovering addict requires. They can't treat it. At least not the way they have been trying to. Deaths due to overdose are no longer rare in Sikkim and now even have a euphemism of their own and this makes the hesitancy among parents and wards to seek professional help even more difficult to understand. Agreed, the society still attaches a stigma to addiction, but there is no escaping such branding by trying to cover-up. Given the rather small society Sikkim moves in, no addiction remains secret for too long so why hide behind the fig-leaf of denial? In fact, denial is something that parents should help the addict overcome. Researchers claim that most addicts remain untreated because they convince themselves that they are not addicted - that they can kick the habit whenever they want. Rarely is this the case. Tantrums and threats don't work as deaddiction tools. If anything, they aggravate the situation. Only professionals, and now we have some in Sikkim, can help. The Government, on its part, can help by arming the rehabilitation workers with infrastructural support and faith. SADA had these provisions, but it has unfortunately been allowed to become a weapon exclusively deployed by the police instead of being allowed to grow into the tool that was collectively used to save youth, punish peddlers and reclaim a generation. Rehab workers can work out a plan of action to combat both addiction and peddling, but that cannot happen if the policy makers refuse to listen to the people who understand the problem the best. Recovering users need to be invited in as consultants to nuance the State's response to the problem of substance abuse.

Meanwhile, the fight against drug abuse, and it is a fight mind you, is not just about curing addicts, it is also about protecting first-time users from experimenting with it. This cannot be achieved by a stray rally once in a year and a couple of posters and hoardings spread around the State. It needs some more human touch. Rehabilitated addicts and social workers need to constantly interact with the most susceptible section of the society and constantly speak of horrors that follow the initial high of substance abuse. The ugly side of addiction has to be propped up in the form of first-hand narratives often enough to have any impact on a generation reared on images which romanticise the experience. All these measures could still fail and there could be many who end up caught in the dizzy spiral of addiction. For them we need a stable society, a concerned community and of course professionally trained therapists; not a law that makes criminals out of addicts.

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Where did Buddhism Get its Reputation for Peace?

NICK SWANN
THECONVERSATION.COM

When teaching an undergraduate class on "Buddhism and Violence", I usually start by asking students to rank religious groups in the order of how many followers they have in the British army. Typically Christians are at the top of students' lists and Buddhists at the bottom.

This reflects an unconscious bias many of these students have regarding Buddhism - they assume that all Buddhists are peaceful and that a Buddhist isn't likely to embrace a career that may well involve violence at some point.

So they're always surprised to find out that there are more Buddhists in the British Army than Muslims and Sikhs put together - despite the relatively small number of Buddhists in Britain.

But why do so many people in the west associate Buddhism with the west?

According to historian Professor Jonathan Walters, the roots lie with colonialism and Christian missionaries. In encountering different beliefs among colonised peoples, missionaries adopted a strategy of framing other religions in such a way that Christianity could be presented as superior and attractive.

In their eyes Islam was too aggressive and focused on strict adherence to rules. Buddhism was too other-worldly, pacifist, and passive to the point of stagnation. Christianity was placed in the Goldilocks spot between the two.

The framing still has serious traction and leads to a certain cognitive dissonance when, for example, Buddhists make the headlines for the

wrong reasons.

Avoiding "onslaught on living beings" and instead cultivating loving-kindness towards them is at the heart of Buddhist ethics; it's the first of five moral precepts, and the one that you have to take if you opt to take any of them at all. The Buddha discouraged violence and counselled kings to find alternative ways of resolving problems. Selling weapons is considered an inappropriate livelihood for a Buddhist.

BUDDHIST VIOLENCE

But Buddhists have been involved in violent conflicts pretty much since the religion first emerged. Justifications for such actions have typically been based on defending the Dharma (the Buddhist teachings), occasionally demonising or dehumanising the enemy to make it less karmically wrong to kill them.

A particularly uncomfortable example of this is found in the fifth century Sri Lankan quasi-mythological Mahavamsa chronicle, in which monks reassure a king that out of the millions he'd just slaughtered only two were Buddhists and the others were more like animals than humans.

When it comes to "Buddhist violence", as with any perceived religious conflicts, religion is only one factor in a complex situation. Often ethnic identity is the real issue - it just happens that one of the ethnic groups in question has historical Buddhist affiliations, the others do not.

At one point the Sri Lankan conflict of 1983-2009 saw three different civil wars playing out at once, as

much as anything along ethnic and political lines: Sinhalese vs Tamils, Sinhalese extremists vs the Sinhalese government, and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam vs other Tamil militant groups.

While it was not as simple as Buddhists, Muslims, and Tamil Hindus fighting each other, the conflict nevertheless saw the rise of Jathika Chintanaya or "Nationalist Thought" which promoted an exclusively Buddhist vision for Sri Lanka which is influential today in organisations such as the Bodu Bala Sena ("Buddhist Power Force").

Tensions between Buddhist and Muslim ethnic groups in Rakhine State in Myanmar spilled over into riots in 2012 and eventually led to the displacement of more than 700,000 Rohingya Muslims to neighbouring Bangladesh. While it explicitly describes itself as non-violent and not responsible for these events, the Buddhist nationalist 969 Movement has nevertheless stoked anti-Muslim sentiments in Myanmar and framed Muslims as a threat to national identity. It's important to note, meanwhile, that these nationalist movements do not speak for all Buddhists - lay or monastic - in either Sri Lanka or Myanmar.

Buddhist monks actually bore arms and fought in the Korean defence against Japanese invasions of the late 16th century. While military service is not prohibited in Buddhist texts, a soldier's life is considered problematic because of the likelihood of dying in battle, psyched up for killing and fixated on violence. Ideally, a Buddhist

wants to die with a calm mind which is more likely to be attracted to a positive rebirth. A violent mind could lead one to Buddhism's realms of hell.

It's not only war and external threats that provide examples of Buddhist violence. Corporal punishment was a feature of the pre-modern Tibetan legal system. In 1997 three Tibetan monks were murdered in Dharamsala - the police linked the suspects in the case to an ongoing controversy within Tibetan Buddhism. Thailand retains the death penalty, last using it in 2018.

PEACEFUL AT ITS CORE

At the end of the class I always fear that students will fixate on the more sensationalist and violent material covered: that one extreme view will replace another. However, the pacifist stereotype of Buddhism is not without foundation.

Witness the Dalai Lama's continued opposition to violence when it comes to the issue of Tibetan independence, the peace activism of Vietnamese monk Thich Nhat Hanh, or the efforts of Navayana ("Ambedkarite") Buddhists in relation to social justice in India, lifting millions of Dalits out of the structural violence of the "caste" system.

But then Buddhism is at least as internally diverse as Christianity or Islam - and, as such, we should be wary of making generalisations. After all, few Christians would like the perception of their religion to be based solely upon images of the Quakers or of the Westboro Baptist Church.

[the writer is Lecturer in Buddhist Studies, University of South Wales]

The common cold might protect you from coronavirus - here's how

MATTHEW JAMES
THECONVERSATION.COM

We often assume that viral infections are caused by individual virus types. But in reality, we're exposed to many viruses on a day to day basis, and co-infection - where someone is simultaneously infected by two or more virus types - is quite common.

The cells lining our throat and lower airways are exposed to the environment around us, making them a prime target for co-infection by respiratory viruses. These range from common-cold-causing rhinoviruses to the more serious influenza viruses, which are often the cause of global pandemics.

One of the most frequent outcomes of co-infection is viral interference, a phenomenon where one virus out-competes and suppresses the replication of the other co-infecting viruses. Interestingly, a growing body of evidence suggests rhinoviruses may interfere with the replication of other respiratory viruses that tend to be more serious. They may even offer the host temporary protection from them.

The good news is that this appears to include SARS-CoV-2 - the virus responsible for COVID-19. In a new study, rhinoviruses have been shown to suppress the replication of this virus.

RHINOVIRUSES

The majority of respiratory viruses that infect humans are rhinoviruses (from the Greek "rhino" for "of the nose"). First identified in 1953, rhinoviruses are extremely small respiratory viruses that are present all over the world. As far as we know, they are only capable of infecting humans.

Rhinovirus infections can be serious in some cases. However, they usually infect us to cause the common cold, a relatively mild disease. In response to such an infection, our immune system produces virus-killing molecules called interferons.

Interferons are produced in response to infections by all types of viruses, but they're produced much faster and in greater quantities in response to rhinovirus compared to other respiratory viruses. Despite this, rhinoviruses have evolved complex mechanisms that allow them to evade interferons and replicate efficiently. It's widely accepted that the rhinovirus-induced interferon response is what produces the symptoms of the common cold, rather than the virus itself.

While rhinoviruses are pretty resistant to interferons, some other respiratory viruses are extremely sensitive to them. Influenza viruses, for example, can't replicate properly in the presence of interferons.

Since rhinovirus infections trigger such a huge interferon response, researchers had the idea that they might offer protection against infection by more deadly, interferon-sensitive viruses, such as influenza.

In recent years, several research groups have investigated this phenomenon in the lab. They found that when cells are infected with rhinovirus,



it triggers an interferon response which prevents them from being infected with the influenza virus.

If rhinovirus infections block the replication of other respiratory viruses, this could affect their spread and patterns of distribution. For instance, evidence suggests that rhinovirus may have interrupted the spread of the H1N1, or "swine flu", influenza virus during the 2009 global pandemic.

THE COLD AND COVID-19

If rhinovirus infections can interfere with the replication and spread of pandemic influenza viruses, could it do the same for interferon-sensitive coronaviruses, such as SARS-CoV-2?

A team of scientists at the University of Glasgow recently set out to answer this question. They infected lab-grown layers of cells that replicates the conditions in the human respiratory tract with rhinovirus, SARS-CoV-2 and both viruses simultaneously.

Interestingly, SARS-CoV-2 replicated much slower in the co-infection scenario. But rhinovirus replication didn't change in the presence or absence of SARS-CoV-2.

To better replicate real-life conditions, the authors also infected the cells with either rhinovirus or SARS-CoV-2 24 hours prior to co-infecting them with the other virus. Rhinovirus was able to suppress the replication of SARS-CoV-2 regardless of whether it was added before or after SARS-CoV-2, suggesting that rhinovirus infection actively protects the cells from SARS-CoV-2.

Next, the authors wanted to confirm that the inhibitory effect on SARS-CoV-2 replication was specifically caused by a rhinovirus-induced interferon response. They co-infected cells with both rhinovirus and SARS-CoV-2 in the presence of a drug which blocks the virus-killing properties of interferons, called BX795.

In this part of the experiment, BX795 allowed SARS-CoV-2 to replicate at a level comparable to that of a single SARS-CoV-2 infection. This confirmed that a rhinovirus-induced interferon response is indeed responsible for the block in SARS-CoV-2 replication seen in the co-infection experiments without BX795.

Using mathematical simulations, the authors also found that more frequent rhinovirus infections among the population would result in a reduced rate of SARS-CoV-2 infection. Taken together, these results confirm that rhinovirus infections

suppress the replication of SARS-CoV-2, which may in turn reduce the number of new cases among the population.

So, can rhinoviruses protect us from infection by SARS-CoV-2? The short answer is yes. However, it's essential to note that the rhinovirus-induced interferon response is an example of innate immunity, meaning that its effect only lasts as long as the invading rhinovirus is in your body.

If you recover from a cold and then come into contact with SARS-CoV-2 a week later, it's unlikely you will have enough interferons to successfully block the SARS-CoV-2 infection. Long-term immunity, which involves the production of highly specific antibodies, is only obtained by coming into direct contact with the virus in question - either in the wild or by vaccination.

So, if you're someone who has not yet had COVID-19 or are unvaccinated, you'll only be protected if you are lucky enough to be infected at the same time that you're experiencing a cold. Rhinoviruses may play a critical role in controlling the spread of SARS-CoV-2 among the human population. The most effective way, however, probably remains vaccination.

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[the writer is Research Assistant, Wellcome-Wolfson Institute for Experimental Medicine, Queen's University Belfast]

Oman amnesty offers undocumented Nepalis chance to return home

CHANDAN KUMAR MANDAL
KATHMANDU, 07 APR [KATHMANDUPOST]: Omani government's general amnesty for undocumented foreigners has once again come as a boon for many Nepalis who have been living and working in the country illegally. Under the amnesty scheme, undocumented Nepali migrant workers can return home without facing any legal consequences, including fine payment and ban from entering the Gulf country for jobs in the future.

According to Sharmila Parajuli Dhakal, Nepali ambassador to Oman, the embassy has been actively sharing information and encouraging Nepalis living in the country without visas and other documents to take advantage of the amnesty scheme.

"The ongoing amnesty is a good chance for undocumented Nepali workers," Dhakal told the Post over the phone from Muscat on Sunday. "We have been reaching out to potential workers so that they can go home without facing any legal consequences."

Earlier, the Omani government had announced its general amnesty scheme for undocumented migrants in October last year. The reprieve programme, whose deadline was to expire in December of that year, was extended till March

31 of this year.

Now, the Omani authorities have once again extended the deadline till June 30, considering the Covid-19 pandemic.

"The general amnesty and its deadline extension can be a big relief for Nepali workers who still have undocumented status," said DB Chhetri, a spokesperson for the Non-Resident Nepali Association. "Normally, those undocumented or absconding people, if found by the local authorities, are arrested and kept at deportation centres and they have to pay hefty fines. If they chose to voluntarily go back to their respective countries under the amnesty scheme, they can skip such legal issues."

According to Chhetri, who is based in Muscat, what makes the ongoing scheme attractive is that it also provides undocumented foreigners to legalise their status and stay in Oman and they will not be prohibited from future entry.

By mid-December last year, nearly 41,000 foreigners had applied to avail of the general amnesty.

According to Oman News Agency (ONA), the Ministry of Labour announced 65,173 foreign workers had applied to leave the country under the scheme and 46,355 of them actually left before the last deadline of March 31.



The Nepal Embassy data shows that 57 Nepali migrant workers benefited under the general amnesty scheme.

According to Dhakal and Chhetri, the number may look small because Nepali workers turning undocumented in Oman is not a bigger issue than it is in other labour destination countries.

"Other countries have a larger number of undocumented workers. Our number is also small because the embassy keeps repatri-

ating stranded and undocumented Nepali workers regularly," said Dhakal. "The embassy keeps rescuing and repatriating especially women migrant workers, who come to work as domestic help in the country through third countries. This time, we are not receiving applications in bulk, but workers are still approaching and the embassy is helping them through the process."

The reason behind fewer number of undocumented Nepalis in

Oman is also because the Sultanate hosts a relatively smaller number of Nepali migrants than other countries in the Persian Gulf region.

According to the Labour Migration Report, 2020, Oman hosts nearly 20,000 Nepali migrants.

"By 2012-13, undocumented status used to be a major concern. The problem doesn't look big now because we kept rescuing the workers and sending them home," said Chhetri. "People also returned

during the pandemic. However, it doesn't mean there are no undocumented Nepalis at all. There must be some people who willingly stayed back with the hope of earning money."

Local media has said that the amnesty scheme was launched by the Omani government in a bid to minimise the negative repercussions of the Covid-19 pandemic on various sectors.

Nepal government data has shown that more than 3,253 Nepalis have returned home since the repatriation and the resumption of regular flights in the aftermath of Covid-19 pandemic.

Meanwhile, Nepal and Oman governments are expected to sign a labour agreement soon, giving hope to the rising demands of Nepali workers in the country.

However, the migration of Nepalis to Oman, which had resumed after a long Covid-19 hiatus, has been affected due to a surge in infections in the country.

"Nepali workers' entry to Oman has gone back to normal days of the pre-pandemic phase. Now, the feared second wave of Covid-19 and the ongoing curfew has affected their arrival," said Chhetri. "With the signing of understanding between both countries, more job opportunities will emerge for Nepali workers."

14-year old arrested for hacking social media accounts of celebrities

SHUVAM DHUNGANA
KATHMANDU, 07 APR [KATHMANDUPOST]: Nepal Police on Monday arrested a teenager for allegedly hacking the Facebook accounts of some film actors and demanding money by texting their Facebook friends.



A special team of the Nepal Police Cyber Crime Bureau, in coordination with District Police Office, Parsa, arrested a 14-year-old boy of Parsa for hacking social media accounts of artists including Deepashree Niraula and Saroj Khanal and asking money from their friends.

Superintendent of Police Navind Aryal said that the teenager was arrested from Parsa on Monday after getting per-

mission from the Kathmandu District Court as he is a minor.

Khanal and Niraula had lodged a complaint with the bureau on March 25 after they came to know that hackers had misused their accounts and demanded money from a mutual friend through Facebook.

According to Aryal the case is being investi-

gated.

"We will reveal full details soon," Aryal told the Post. "Police are investigating the juvenile under the Electronic Transaction Act-2008."

Data provided by the bureau shows that a total of over 5,574 cases have been filed at the Cyber-crime Bureau between 2016 and 2020, and the number of cases have

been increasing every year.

Police officials believe that increased internet access has led to a greater misuse of social networking sites, resulting in a rise in cybercrimes.

Baburam Aryal, a lawyer specialising on information technology and cybercrime, also believes that easy access of the internet and lack of awareness about the use of the internet and its possible consequences have resulted in the rise in cyber crimes.

"Teenagers are very curious and they sometimes unknowingly commit crime and get arrested," Aryal told the Post. "Therefore it's the parents' responsibility to monitor what their children are upto while using

the internet."

According to an inspector at the Cyber Crime Bureau, who spoke in the condition of anonymity as they are not allowed to talk with the media, a lot of people don't even realise they are committing a crime.

"Cybercrime isn't just limited to the misuse of, and harassment through, social media; even stalking and cyber-bullying falls under this category," said the officer.

Nepal doesn't yet have adequate laws to deal with cybercrimes, so all kinds of crimes taking place in the online space are handled under the Electronic Transaction Act-2008, which has a provision of a jail term up to five years or a fine up to Rs20,000.

CRPF harassing voters in Bengal at Shah's behest: Mamata



BANESWAR (WB), APR 7 (PTI): West Bengal Chief Minister and Trinamool Congress supreme Mamata Banerjee on Wednesday alleged that the CRPF personnel are harassing voters in the state at the behest of Union Home Minister Amit Shah.

Addressing a rally here in Cooch Behar district, she accused CRPF personnel of molesting women and beating people during the ongoing assembly elections.

"They are obstructing electors to cast their votes.

Union Home Minister Amit Shah has

instructed them to do so," Banerjee alleged.

She claimed at least 10 people have been killed in the state during the ongoing polls.

"The Election Commission is running the administration. Please see that nobody is killed during the polling process. I request you to monitor CRPF personnel who are on duty now in the state. They should not be allowed to harass women. There are cases of girls being molested by the central force employees," she said.

Five candidates, including two women, were assaulted, while

clashes between rival political groups erupted during the third phase of polling in the state on Tuesday.

Television grabs showed TMC nominee in Arambagh Sujata Mondal being chased in an open field by people wielding sticks and iron rods and then hitting her on the head with sticks.

Her security officer was also injured.

Other candidates who were allegedly attacked or heckled during the day were Papiya Adhikary and Swapan Dasgupta of the BJP and Dr Nirmal Maji and Najmul Karim of the TMC.

7 new cases push COVID-19 tally of Andamans to 5,123

PORT BLAIR, APR 7 (PTI): The COVID-19 caseload in Andaman and Nicobar Islands rose to 5,123 as seven more people tested positive for the disease in the Union Territory, a health department official said on Wednesday.

The fresh cases were detected during contact tracing, he said.

The death toll remained at 62 as no new fatality due to the infection was reported in the last 24 hours.

Nine people were cured of the disease during the period, taking the total number of recoveries in the archipelago to 5,010, the official said.

The Union Territory now has 51 active cases.

Altogether, 12,772 health and frontline workers have been inoculated and 9,599 people above 45 years of age received the vaccine shots, he said.

People arriving here by flights or reaching by

ships from Kolkata or Chennai are mandatorily required to show a negative coronavirus report before the authorities allow them to enter the islands.

The overall COVID situation is under control in the archipelago, the official said.

The Andaman and Nicobar administration has conducted 3,28,737 sample tests for COVID-19 so far, and the positivity rate stands at 1.56 per cent.

Shyam Thapa hospitalised after testing COVID-19 positive



KOLKATA, APR 7 (PTI): Legendary Indian forward and chairman of the All India Football Federation's technical committee Shyam Thapa has tested positive for COVID-19 and has been hospitalised.

The 73-year-old got himself admitted to a private hospital here on Tuesday evening after his test report came positive on Monday. "I was feeling tasteless and there was a loss of appetite. My test report came

positive and as a precautionary measure I got myself admitted. Now, I'm feeling stable and much better," Thapa, who helped India bag a bronze medal in the Merdeka Tournament and the Bangkok Asian Games in 1970, told PTI.

Thapa was administered the first shot of COVID-19 vaccine on March 20.

"The second shot was due yesterday but now it has been postponed," he added.

Mizoram logs 8 fresh COVID-19 cases, tally at 4,508

AIZAWL, APR 7 (PTI): At least eight more people, including two children, tested positive for novel coronavirus in Mizoram, pushing the tally to 4,508, an official said on Wednesday.

The northeastern state now has 50 ac-

tive cases, while 4,447 people have recovered from the disease.

A total of 11 people have died due to the contagion so far, he said.

The state has tested 2,56,181 samples for COVID-19, including

1,149 on Tuesday, the official said.

At least 57,408 people have been administered the first dose of vaccine, of which 18,044 beneficiaries have received the second shot, the health department said.

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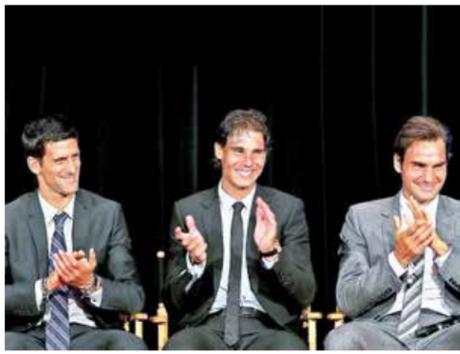
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When will next generation of tennis overtake the Big Three?



MIAMI, APR 7 (AP): The next generation of men's tennis remains a jumble of unrealized potential.

With Novak Djokovic, Rafael Nadal and Roger Federer skipping the Miami Open, the tournament was expected to bring the game's new faces into sharper focus. Instead, the outlook remains fuzzy as the clay season begins.

Sunday's match between No. 37-ranked Hubert Hurkacz and No. 31 Jannik Sinner was the first ATP Masters 1000 final since 2003 with two players ranked outside the top 30. Hurkacz became the lowest-ranked champion in the ATP's top-level series since 2005.

Meanwhile, for players touted as future Grand Slam champions, Miami represented an opportunity missed. Daniil Medvedev, Stefanos Tsitsipas and Alexander Zverev failed to make it even to the semifinals.

With the Big Three absent, I think all the NextGen guys were trying their best to play their best game, to compete as hard as they can," Hurkacz said.

Hopefully the spectators enjoyed it.

But what should fans make of it? Twenty-somethings have been trying to overtake the Big Three for years, and no front-runner for 2021 emerged in Miami.

Medvedev, seeded No. 1 at a Masters 1000 event for the first time, was upset in the fourth round by Roberto Bautista Agut. No. 2 Tsitsipas exited in the same round with a loss to Hurkacz.

I felt like it was my opportunity, Tsitsipas said.

There was more space for me to show something greater.

No. 3 Zverev flopped worst of all, double-faulting three times on break point in a loss to No. 83-ranked Emil Ruusuvuori. No. 4 Andrey Rublev, a Russian who leads the tour with 20 wins this year, reached the semifinals before Hurkacz upset him.

This all came after Nadal and Federer withdrew before the tournament started due to injuries, while Djokovic decided to stay home in Serbia amid the pandemic.

For Hurkacz, 24, the title is by far the biggest

of his career, and the first for a Polish player in a Masters 1000 event. But he won't be among the favorites at the French Open.

In sum, no 20-something appears poised to wrest the mantle from the 30-somethings who have dominated the sport for so long. Dominic Thiem won his first major title at the U.S. Open in September, but he is just 5-4 this year and skipped Miami.

The next generation still has to show they can beat the Big Three, Sinner said.

The next generation is not ready yet to win against them consistently. At some point there will be the moment; I don't know when. It can be two years or five years, I don't know. But the moment will come.

Perhaps Grand Slam greatness will skip a generation, and it will be someone now a teenager who supplants the Big Three. Sinner, a 19-year-old baseline basher from Italy, took a giant leap in Miami, just his third Masters 1000 event.

Also making a splash was unseeded 20-year-old American Sebastian Korda, who reached the quarterfinals before losing to Rublev. Korda, the son of former Australian Open champion Petr Korda, is widely considered the best hope to end an 18-year drought in major titles for U.S. men.

He sounds more patient than some fans.

My parents are super big on baby steps, Korda said.

"You can play tennis for so long if you stay healthy for 15-plus years. Guys now are playing until 40; it's incredible. There are a lot of years ahead of me.

I'll always put my head down and keep working, and hopefully one day I could achieve something like what my dad achieved.

Korda and Sinner have considerable flair and star appeal, as do Medvedev, Tsitsipas, Zverev and Rublev.

The future of tennis looks great, because the generation is changing, Rublev said.

The NextGen players, they are different. They look different compared with previous ones. I think they have charisma.

Charisma, yes, but not yet many trophies.

SAN FRANCISCO (AP): Stephen Curry's tender tailbone much-improved, the two-time MVP led one of those furious finishes that defined Golden State during recent years and all those NBA Finals runs.

Kelly Oubre Jr. converted a pair of free throws with 7.7 seconds left to give Golden State the lead, and Milwaukee missed at the end as the Warriors held off the Bucks 122-121 on Tuesday night.

Curry knocked down a 3-pointer with 1:06 to play on the way to 41 points with five 3-pointers as his team came back late and worked until the final buzzer to snap a three-game losing streak.

"Honestly, I'm enjoying the night. You could see a lot of emotion tonight from everybody," Curry said. "We all knew how much we needed this, and you want to maintain that joy and energy and hopefully come Friday, Saturday put together two really good performances and give yourself a chance to win and sustain that."

Curry and his coach, Steve Kerr, shared an extra-long hug afterward



and exhaled.

"When you lose what we'd lost in a row, a win deserves a hug," Kerr said.

Jrue Holiday scored the go-ahead basket after his offensive rebound with 29 seconds left.

Andrew Wiggins' driving dunk with 1:59 to play made it a one-point game, then Golden State got a defensive stop before Kent Bazemore put his team ahead the next time down.

Oubre wound up with 19 points and Bazemore scored 18 in just the Warriors' second win in nine games. They trailed by 12 late in the third.

"Tonight was a good example of just kind of hanging in there after things had gone south on us and Milwaukee built that big lead in the second half," Kerr said. "Really loved the energy and just the competitiveness that got us a win."

Khris Middleton scored 28 points as Milwaukee again missed injured big man Giannis Antetokounmpo. Holiday finished with 29 points and knocked down back-to-back 3-pointers that weren't quite enough.

Antetokounmpo sat out his second straight game with a sore left knee after missing a

129-128 win at Sacramento on Saturday. The two-time reigning MVP, who scored 47 points to match his season high in a 127-109 win over Portland on Friday, missed his fourth game out of the Bucks' last nine after the hope had been he would play Tuesday.

"He was warming up tonight and just felt it a little bit," Milwaukee coach Mike Budenholzer said. "Just made the decision that tonight was not a good night, a night he should be out."

For the Warriors, this performance marked progress on many fronts: the energy on both ends,

the attention to detail that had lacked during a particularly discouraging recent road trip — and, of course, the W result.

Curry shot 14 for 21 and 5 of 10 from deep. He had missed Friday's game at Toronto with the bruised tailbone, then played nearly 37 minutes Sunday at Atlanta.

"I think we all should just stop and appreciate what he's doing right now," Bazemore said.

Milwaukee had won two in a row against Golden State, including a 138-99 rout on Christmas Day, and the Bucks saw the end to a three-game winning streak on the Warriors' home floor.

Golden State came out shooting and made 7 of 11 to jump ahead 18-5 and force two early timeouts by the Bucks.

Kerr was pleased how his team responded after a tough week.

His pregame wish: "No. 1, defending without fouling would be awesome. That was so disappointing the other night to really play a good game overall and compete and have a chance to win and just hack our way to a loss."

TIP-INS

Bucks: Reserve F P.J. Tucker missed his seventh straight game with a strained left calf. He didn't practice Monday and has played in only three games for the Bucks since they acquired him from Houston. ... Holiday was named Eastern Conference player of the week Monday and had 33 points, 11 assists and seven rebounds at Sacramento without Antetokounmpo. Holiday signed a four-year extension Sunday that will be worth at least \$134 million if he exercises the fourth-year option.

Warriors: Curry is just 88 points (17,695) from Hall of Famer Wilt Chamberlain's career franchise scoring record of 17,783. ... The Warriors hit five of their first six shots — 3s by Curry, Oubre and Wiggins — for a quick 13-3 lead and Bucks timeout at 9:30.

UP NEXT

Bucks: At Dallas on Thursday night having won 21 straight against the Mavericks.

Warriors: Host Washington on Friday night in the first of two second-half matchups with the Wizards.

Johnson, McIlroy seeking exclusive company at the Masters

AUGUSTA, GA. (AP): Rory McIlroy stopped by to encourage Tiger Woods as he recovers from multiple leg injuries and might have come away with some inspiration of his own.

"In his family room he's got this trophy cabinet and it's his 15 major trophies," McIlroy said Tuesday. "I said, 'That's really cool. Where are all the others?' He said, 'I don't know.'"

Woods — who isn't playing this year because of injuries from a car crash in February — has 82 victories on the PGA Tour alone, a record he shares with Sam Snead, and more than a dozen others from the European, Asian, Japan and Australian tours.

"He said, 'Yeah, my mom has some, and a few are in the office and a few are wherever,'" McIlroy said. "I was driving home and I was thinking, 'That's all he cared about. So how easy that must have felt for him to win all the others.' That was just always in my mind. He talked about, 'These are the four weeks that matter.'"

Only one week matters to McIlroy at the moment, and not just because it's the first full week in April at Augusta



National.

The Masters — Woods has five of those silver trophies — is the one major keeping McIlroy from joining the most elite company in golf by completing the career Grand Slam. Woods was the most recent in 2000. The others are Jack Nicklaus, Gary Player, Ben Hogan and Gene Sarazen.

He isn't alone in his pursuit of trying to join an exclusive group.

McIlroy played his first practice round of the week with Dustin Johnson, the defending champion who established the scoring record of 20-under 268 in November when the course

was much softer.

Only three other players have won the Masters back-to-back. Woods — him again — was the last to achieve that in 2002. Johnson isn't much on history, but he knew that one.

He also knows it won't be easy.

"You're going to have to put four good rounds together, especially with normal conditions," Johnson said. "You've got to do everything well. And with it firm and fast, it's just a really hard golf course because any hole at any time can jump out and get you."

"It just very tough to win once, and especially

multiple times."

Those two words — firm and fast — are being mentioned about as much as green and jacket, and for good reason. Even with the tournament two days away from starting, shots landing on the greens are making a hollow sound that indicates this won't be target practice.

"It was obviously still the same golf course tee-to-green, but it was a different golf course at the same time," Thomas said after a Tuesday practice round with McIlroy. "Any sort of past memory that you had, you almost had to throw it out the window."

McIlroy has a mixed bag of memories. It's hard to overlook 2011, when he was 21 and had curly locks spilling out from under his cap. He built a four-shot lead going into the last round and was on the verge of winning his first major until a series of big blunders — a tee shot into the cabins left of No. 10, a four-putt on No. 12, a tee shot left of the Rae's Creek tributary on No. 13. It added to an 80.

That's as close as he's come to a green jacket. In his second try at completing the career Grand Slam, he played in the final group with Jordan Spieth in 2016 and shot himself out of it with a 77. Two years later, he shot 65 to get into the final group with Patrick Reed and shot 74.

Good and bad, he tries to draw from both.

Different about this year is the state of his game. McIlroy hasn't won since Shanghai in the fall of 2019, and he got caught up chasing speed and distance after watching Bryson DeChambeau overpower Winged Foot to win the U.S. Open. With his long-time coach unable to travel as much, McIlroy said he has brought on famed English instructor

Pete Cowen.

He talked about a "big picture" at Augusta, not a sense of urgency.

"I'm obviously focused on this week, but it's bigger than that," McIlroy said. "It's a journey, right? And it's a journey to try to get back to playing the game the way I know that I can play the game."

The lesson imparted from Cowen is to not to look back at what he's done in a bid to go forward. McIlroy has won four majors — the PGA Championship twice, the U.S. Open and the British Open — though he is approaching the seven-year anniversary of his last major title.

He not under as much scrutiny as recent years, certainly not in 2015, his first crack at the Grand Slam.

"It feels a little more relaxed this week, which isn't a bad thing," McIlroy said. "Yeah, I would have loved to have done it at this point, but I realize I've still got plenty more years to do it. If I were able to do it, I'd join a very small list of golfers in history that have been able to do it. So I know where it would put me in the game and how cool it would be, and I would love to do it one day."

Tokyo Olympic torch relay taken off streets of Osaka

TOKYO (AP): The Tokyo Olympic torch relay will not run through the streets of Osaka prefecture next week because of rising COVID-19 cases. The move is a setback for Tokyo organizers, who began the relay two weeks ago from northeastern Fukushima prefecture with 10,000 runners planning to crisscross Japan over the course of four months.

The Olympics open in just over 100 days on July 23. In a last-minute change of plans, organizers said in a

statement Wednesday that runners and the torch will be involved in some event in an Osaka city park on the days when the relay was to cross the entire prefecture. That was to be April 13-14.

"Given the circumstances, the Osaka prefectural authorities today requested Tokyo 2020 to hold the Osaka segment of the Olympic torch relay in Expo '70 Commemorative Park rather than on public roads," Tokyo organizers said in a statement.

The statement said the Osaka segment would be conducted in the park "for all torchbearers who wish to run there." It also said "no spectators" would be admitted either day.

The ordeal of keeping the relay on track reminds of the giant problems that are likely when the Olympics and Paralympics take place with a total of 15,400 athletes from more than 200 countries entering Japan. They will be joined by tens of thousands of

other officials, judges, media and broadcasters.

Fans from abroad are banned, and it is not yet clear how many local fans will be able to attend Olympic events. Tokyo organizing committee president Seiko Hashimoto promised a decision this month on venue capacity, but hinted last week that the announcement could be delayed.

Ticket sales were to account for \$800 million in revenue for the organizers, a large chunk but small compared to

the official bill for the Olympics of \$15.4 billion, most of which falls on Japanese taxpayers.

Osaka prefecture Governor Hirofumi Yoshimura asked people on Wednesday not to make unnecessary trips in the area.

"Medical systems (in Osaka) are on the verge of collapse," Yoshimura said at a news conference, attributing the rapid spike in infections to new variants of the virus. "Obviously it spreads more rapidly and it is more contagious."

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China warns Washington not to boycott Winter Olympics

BEIJING (AP): China's government warned Washington on Wednesday not to boycott next year's Winter Olympics in Beijing after the Biden administration said it was talking with allies about a joint approach to complaints of human rights abuses.

A Foreign Ministry spokesperson rejected accusations of abuses against ethnic minorities in the Xinjiang region. He warned of an unspecified "robust Chinese response" to a potential Olympics boycott.

"The politicization of sports will damage the spirit of the Olympic Charter and the interests of athletes from all countries," said the spokesperson, Zhao Lijian. "The international community including the U.S. Olympic Committee will not accept it."

Human rights groups are protesting China's hosting of the games, due to start in February 2022. They have urged a boycott or other measures to call attention to accusations of Chinese abuses against Uyghurs, Tibetans and residents of Hong Kong.

The U.S. State Department suggested an Olympic boycott was among the possibilities but a senior official said later a boycott has not been discussed. The International Olympic Committee and the U.S. Olympic and Paralympic Committee have said in the past they oppose boycotts.

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Iran ship serving as Red Sea troop base near Yemen attacked

DUBAI, UNITED ARAB

EMIRATES (AP): An Iranian cargo ship believed to be a base for the paramilitary Revolutionary Guard and anchored for years in the Red Sea off Yemen has been attacked, Tehran acknowledged Wednesday.

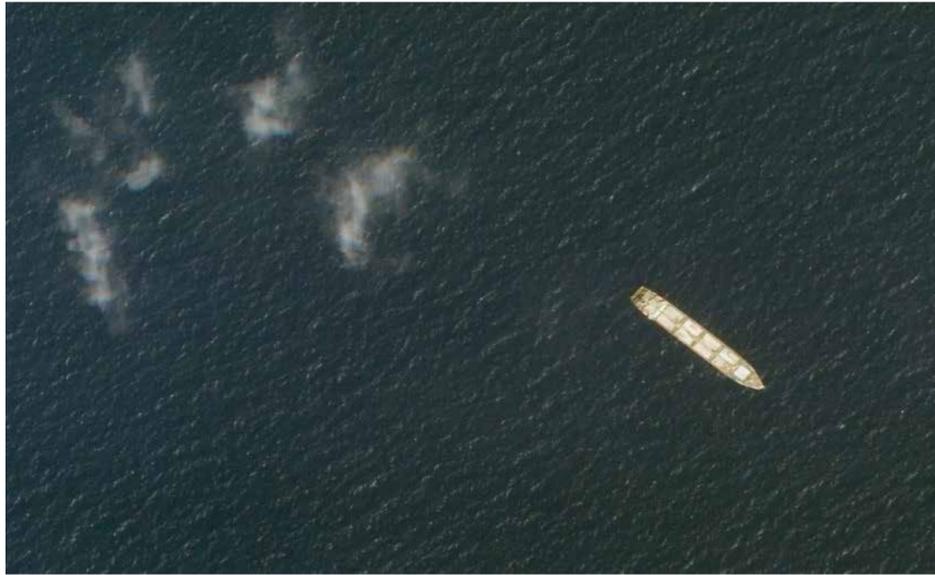
Iran's Foreign Ministry confirmed the attack on the MV Saviz, suspected to have been carried out by Israel. The assault came as Iran and world powers sat down in Vienna for the first talks about the U.S. potentially rejoining Tehran's tattered nuclear deal, showing that challenges ahead don't rest merely in those negotiations.

The ship's long presence in the region, repeatedly criticized by Saudi Arabia, has come as the West and United Nations experts say Iran has provided arms and support to Yemen's Houthi rebels amid that country's yearslong war. Iran denies arming the Houthis, though components found in the rebels' weaponry link back to Tehran.

Iran previously described the Saviz as aiding in "anti-piracy" efforts in the Red Sea and the Bab el-Mandeb strait, a crucial choke point in international shipping. A statement attributed to Foreign Ministry spokesman Saeed Khatibzadeh described the ship as a commercial vessel.

"Fortunately, no casualties were reported ... and technical investigations are underway," Khatibzadeh said. "Our country will take all necessary measures through international authorities."

In an earlier state TV statement, an anchor cited a New York Times story, which quoted an anonymous U.S. official telling the newspaper that Israel informed



America it carried out an attack Tuesday morning on the vessel. Israeli officials declined to comment about the incident when reached by The Associated Press, as did the Saviz's owner.

However, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Tuesday brought up Iran in a speech to his Likud party after being asked to form a government following the country's recent election.

"We must not go back to the dangerous nuclear deal with Iran, because a nuclear deal is an existential threat to the state of Israel and a great threat to the security of the entire world," Netanyahu said.

Iranian President Hassan Rouhani called the Vienna talks a "success" while speaking to his Cabinet on Wednesday.

"Today, one united statement is being heard that all sides of the nuclear deal have concluded that there is no solution better but the deal," he said.

Iran's semiofficial Tasnim news agency, believed to be close to the

Guard, blamed the blast on explosives planted on Saviz's hull. It did not blame anyone for the attack and said Iranian officials likely would offer more information in the coming days.

In a statement, the U.S. military's Central Command only said it was "aware of media reporting of an incident involving the Saviz in the Red Sea."

"We can confirm that no U.S. forces were involved in the incident," the command said. "We have no additional information to provide."

The Saviz, owned by the state-linked Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Lines, came to the Red Sea in late 2016, according to ship-tracking data. In the years since, it has drifted off the Dahlak archipelago, a chain of islands off the coast of the nearby African nation of Eritrea in the Red Sea. It likely received supply replenishments and switched crew via passing Iranian vessels using the waterway.

Briefing materials from the Saudi military earlier obtained by the AP showed men on the

vessel dressed in camouflage, military-style fatigues, as well as small boats capable of ferrying cargo to the Yemeni coast. That briefing material also included pictures showing a variety of antennas on the vessel that the Saudi government described as unusual for a commercial cargo ship, suggesting it conducted electronic surveillance. Other images showed the ship had mounts for .50-caliber machine guns.

The Washington Institute for Near-East Policy has called the Saviz an "Iranian mothership" in the region, similarly describing it as an intelligence-gathering base and an armory for the Guard. Policy papers from the institute don't explain how they came to that conclusion, though its analysts routinely have access to Gulf and Israeli military sources.

The Saviz had been under international sanctions until Iran's 2015 nuclear deal with world powers, which saw Tehran receive economic relief in exchange for limiting its enrichment of uranium. The

Trump administration later renewed American sanctions on the Saviz as part of its decision to unilaterally withdraw from the accord.

In June 2019, Saudi Arabia flew a critically ill Iranian off the Saviz after Tehran made a request through the United Nations for assistance.

Amid the wider tensions between the U.S. and Iran, a series of mysterious blasts have targeted ships in the region, including some the U.S. Navy blamed on Iran. Among the ships damaged recently was an Israeli-owned car carrier in an attack Netanyahu blamed on Iran. Another was an Iranian cargo ship in the Mediterranean Sea.

Iran also has blamed Israel for a recent series of attacks, including a mysterious explosion in July that destroyed an advanced centrifuge assembly plant at its Natanz nuclear facility. Another is the November killing of Mohsen Fakhri-zadeh, a top Iranian scientist who founded the Islamic Republic's military nuclear program two decades ago.

Myanmar security forces attack town that resisted with arms



YANGON, MYANMAR

(AP): Security forces on Wednesday stormed a town in northwestern Myanmar where some residents had used homemade hunting rifles to resist the military's February seizure of power, killing at least seven civilians and injuring many others, local news reports said.

The online news site Khonumthung Burmese said the attack on Kalay began before dawn. Videos on the site included what appeared to be sounds of rifle fire, high-caliber weapons and grenade explosions. Posts on social media said rocket-propelled grenades were used in the attack, but provided no evidence.

The news site said that in addition to the seven fatalities, many people were wounded and arrested in the town, also known as Kalemmyo. Over half the town's population are members of the Chin ethnic minority.

Security forces have killed at least 581 protesters and bystanders in their crackdown on protests against the Feb. 1 coup that ousted the elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi, according to the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners, which monitors casualties and arrests.

Nearly all of the protests have been nonviolent, but as police and soldiers have increased their use of lethal force,

some participants have armed themselves with homemade weapons such as gasoline bombs for self-defense. In Kalay, some residents took up simple but deadly homemade hunting rifles.

Myanmar Now, another online news site, reported Tuesday that protesters in Kalay had set up neighborhood strongholds and inflicted casualties on the security forces.

It said that on March 28, when the army sought to attack Kalay, protesters in the town and nearby villages put up fierce resistance. The attack took place a day after the junta's forces killed more than 110 people around the country, the highest single-day death toll since the coup.

The report said protesters "more than held their own. Four of them died that night, but so did an equal number of the enemy, including an officer or two. The protesters also managed to wound 17 of their heavily armed attackers."

The protesters, who have organized themselves in a "Kalay Civil Army," inflicted more casualties in the following days, it said.

Daily protests against military rule continued Wednesday in other cities and towns, including Mogok in central Myanmar, and Bago, northeast of Yangon, where social media posts said security forces fired live ammunition at demonstrators.

Leaders of Russia and China tighten their grips, grow closer

MOSCOW (AP): They're not leaders for life — not technically, at least. But in political reality, the powerful tenures of China's Xi Jinping and, as of this week, Russia's Vladimir Putin are looking as if they will extend much deeper into the 21st century — even as the two superpowers whose destinies they steer gather more clout with each passing year.

What's more, as they consolidate political control at home, sometimes with harsh measures, they're working together more substantively than ever in a growing challenge to the West and the world's other superpower, the United States, which elects its leader every four years.

This week, Putin signed a law allowing him to potentially hold onto power until 2036. The 68-year-old Russian president, who has been in power for more than two decades — longer than any other Kremlin leader since Soviet dictator Josef Stalin — pushed through a constitutional vote last year allowing him to run again in 2024 when his current six-year term ends. He has overseen a systematic crackdown on dissent.

In China, Xi, who came to power in 2012, has imposed even tighter controls on the already repressive political scene, emerging as one of his nation's most powerful leaders in the seven decades of Communist Party rule that began with Mao Zedong's often-brutal regime. Under Xi, the government has rounded up, imprisoned or silenced intellectuals, legal activists and other voices, cracked down on Hong Kong's opposition and used security forces to suppress calls for minority rights in Xinjiang, Tibet and Inner Mongolia.

Xi has sidelined rivals, locked up critics and tightened the party's control over information. An ongoing crackdown against corruption has won popular support while

also keeping potential competitors in line.

His steady consolidation of power led to the removal of term limits on the Chinese presidency in 2018, demolishing a convention the party had established to prevent a repeat of the abuse produced by Mao's one-person rule. Xi further telegraphed his intention to remain in power by breaking from tradition and not indicating a preferred successor. One who appeared eager to take on the role, Sun Zhengcai, was brought down in 2017 and sentenced to life in prison on corruption charges.

And in Russia, Putin's most outspoken critic, Alexei Navalny, was arrested in January upon his return from Germany, where he spent five months recovering from a nerve-agent poisoning that he blames on the Kremlin — an accusation Russian authorities have denied. In February, Navalny was sentenced to 2½ years in prison.

In defying the West, Putin and Xi both have tapped nationalist feelings. Russia's 2014 annexation of Ukraine's Crimea propelled Putin's approval ratings to nearly 90% before they slackened amid economic woes and unpopular pensions reform.

But the impact of Putin's and Xi's enduring retention of power hardly ends at their respective nations' borders. It ripples outward into the geopolitical balance of power in countless ways.

As Moscow's relations with the West sank to post-Cold War lows amid accusations of election meddling and hacking attacks, Putin has increasingly sought to strengthen ties with China. And while China so far has avoided a showdown with the West like Russia's, it is coming under growing pressure from Washington and its allies over Beijing's human rights record in Xinjiang, Hong Kong and the South China Sea.



U.S. President Joe Biden has taken an increasingly tough line with both leaders, recently describing Putin as a "killer" and having his top national security aides exhortate China for a litany of issues. Such approaches suggest that Moscow and Beijing will have incentives to build an even stronger alliance.

Like their nations, the two leaders themselves have fostered a closer relationship, too.

Putin and Xi have developed strong personal ties to bolster a "strategic partnership" between the two former Communist rivals as they vie with the West for influence. And even though Moscow and Beijing in the past rejected the possibility of forging a military alliance, Putin said last fall that such a prospect can't be ruled out entirely.

While both Putin and Xi each appear to be firmly entrenched, numerous challenges persist. The pandemic, for one, posed a major challenge for both rulers, and they took a similarly cautious approach when it struck.

Putin responded last spring by introducing a sweeping six-week lockdown that severely hurt the already weak Russian economy. His approval rating plummeted to a historic low of 59%. Later, the government eased restrictions and steered clear from new lockdowns, help-

ing reduce economic damage and shore up Putin's ratings.

Xi remained out of the public eye in the first uncertain weeks, possibly fearing that any misstep could have given rivals a chance to topple him. In the end, China controlled the pandemic better than many other places, enhancing Xi's position as leader.

Xi must also figure out how to satisfy ambitious young politicians who may see their careers being stymied by his lengthy tenure. And he has to demonstrate that his extended rule will not lead to the excesses of the Mao years, especially the disastrous and deeply traumatic 1966-76 Cultural Revolution.

"Xi has to manage an essential paradox. He venerates Mao and is building the same cult of personality and centrality of the party," said Daniel Blumenthal, director of Asian Studies at the American Enterprise Institute. "But he knows his people fear and loathe Maoism so he has to also pretend he is not Mao. For now, he is an unchallenged strong leader, dealing with cracks and fissures in the party and society through Maoist-style campaigns and purges."

Putin faces even more daunting challenges. Russia's economy is a fraction of China's, and its overwhelming reliance on exports of oil and gas and other raw

materials makes it vulnerable to market fluctuations. Western economic and financial sanctions have cut Moscow's access to Western technologies and capital markets, slowing down the economy and impeding modernization efforts. Stagnant living standards and falling incomes have fueled growing discontent.

Russia's increasingly close ties with China are part of its strategy to offset Western sanctions. Chinese companies provided substitutes for missing Western technologies, helped with major infrastructure projects like energy supplies to Crimea and channeled cash flows to ease the burden from sanctions on Kremlin-connected tycoons.

"Beijing helped Moscow, at least to some extent, to withstand U.S. and EU pressure," Alexander Gabuev, the top China expert with the Carnegie Moscow Center wrote in a recent analysis. "This assistance also allowed Moscow to become more assertive elsewhere in the world, from being present in the Middle East and Africa to supporting the Venezuelan regime and interfering in U.S. elections."

Military cooperation remains a high-stakes frontier. As U.S. pressure grew, Russia has moved to expand military ties with China. Their armed forces have held a series of joint drills, and Putin has noted that Russia has provided China with cutting-edge military technologies.

But a full-on alliance — putting the joint military might of Xi's and Putin's grips on their nations? Something like that seems less abstract when the increasingly tight relationship between the two long-term leaders is taken into consideration.

"We don't need it," Putin said in October. "But theoretically, it's quite possible to imagine it."

Bill Murray says he was tricked into starring 'Ghostbusters II'

LOS ANGELES, APR 7 (PTI): Hollywood star Bill Murray says he was reluctant to do another "Ghostbusters" movie but was tricked into starring in its sequel.

"Ghostbusters", a 1984 classic comedy about three eccentric parapsychologists who start a ghost-catching business in New York City, featured Murray, Dan Aykroyd, Harold Ramis, Sigourney Weaver and Rick Moranis in key roles.

Murray and the cast members were pitched an idea by the studio that never materialised in the 1989 sequel, the actor said during a panel at the Santa Barbara International Film Festival, reported Collider.

"I thought that the only reason anyone would want another one was just to make money. And I was probably the most reluctant. Someone outfoxed me anyway.

"I don't know if Ivan (Reitman, director) set it up but they got us all back together in a room, and really, we hadn't been together in a room since the movie came out and it was just really, really fun to be together. We were really funny together...They got us all together and they pitched a story idea that was really great. I thought, Holy cow, we could make that work," Murray recalled.

Based on that pitch, Murray agreed to star in the film but the sequel was very different from the story they were initially given.

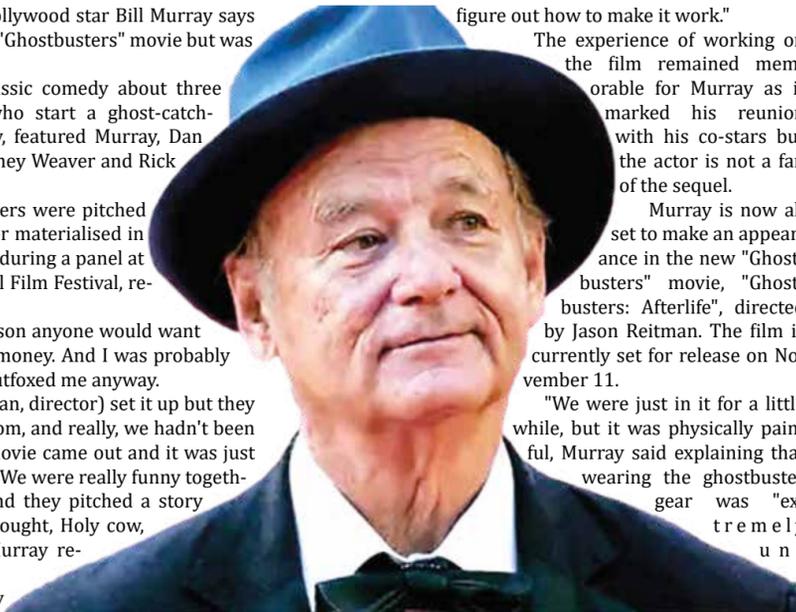
"It ended up not being the story they wrote. They got us in the sequel under false pretenses. Harold (Ramis, Murray's co-star) had this great idea, but by the time we got to shooting it, I showed up on set and went, 'What the hell is this? What is this thing?' But we were already shooting it, so we had to

figure out how to make it work."

The experience of working on the film remained memorable for Murray as it marked his reunion with his co-stars but the actor is not a fan of the sequel.

Murray is now all set to make an appearance in the new "Ghostbusters: Afterlife", directed by Jason Reitman. The film is currently set for release on November 11.

"We were just in it for a little while, but it was physically painful, Murray said explaining that wearing the ghostbuster gear was extremely un-



comfortable" though they now "batteries the size of earrings".

"It's still a really heavy thing to wear, all the time. The special effects in this one are a lot of wind and dirt in your face, and there was a lot of going down and getting back up. I was like, 'What is this? What am I doing? These are like Bulgarian deadlifts, or a Russian kettlebell, getting up and down with this thing on my back.' It was very uncomfortable.

Court dismisses Kangana's plea over Akhtar defamation suit

MUMBAI, APR 7 (PTI): A sessions court here on Monday dismissed an application filed by Bollywood actor Kangana Ranaut challenging the proceedings initiated against her by a magistrate's court in connection with a defamation complaint lodged by veteran lyricist Javed Akhtar.

Additional Sessions Judge S U Baghele said the plea filed by the applicant (Ranaut) is dismissed.

Ranaut (34) had sought the sessions court to quash the legal proceedings and summons issued by the magistrate's court in suburban Andheri in the defamation complaint lodged against her by Akhtar.

Akhtar (76) had filed the complaint in the magistrate's court in last November claiming the actor had made defamatory statements against him in a television interview, which allegedly damaged his reputation.

The sessions court in Dindoshi in Mumbai had on April 3 reserved its order on the application filed by Ranaut.

In her application, Ranaut had challenged the issuance of the process and the legality and validity of the February 1, 2021 order passed by the magistrate and the subsequent action of issuing a bailable warrant against her for failing to appear before the court.

Ranaut's advocate Rizwan Siddiquee had argued in the sessions court that as per provisions of section 200 of the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC), a magis-



trate has to first examine and record the statements of the complainant and the witnesses before issuance of notice or proceedings in criminal complaints.

Siddiquee claimed that since the magistrate's court had not recorded the statements of the witnesses, it had vitiated the procedure.

Ranaut in her plea had sought the sessions court to suspend and quash the proceedings initiated against her.

Advocate Jay Bharadwaj, appearing for Akhtar, had opposed the application and submitted that the order passed by the magistrate did not warrant interference.

On March 1, magistrate R R Khan had issued a bailable warrant against Ranaut after she failed to appear before the court as per earlier directions.

Ranaut later sought cancellation of the warrant before the magistrate.

The court on March 25 cancelled the warrant after Ranaut furnished a cash bail of Rs 20,000 and a surety of Rs 15,000.

In his complaint, Akhtar claimed that Ranaut had made defamatory comments against him in an interview by dragging his name while referring to a "coterie" existing in Bollywood, following the death of actor Sushant Singh Rajput in June last year.

The magistrate had directed the Mumbai police to carry out a preliminary probe into the complaint.

In February, the police submitted a report to the court saying an offence of defamation was made out against Ranaut.



PREPPED TO IMPRESS! The actress, Megan Fox looks vibrant in a Versace sweater dress and Louboutin boots in Los Angeles.

Katrina Kaif tests positive for COVID-19



MUMBAI, APR 7 (PTI): Actor Katrina Kaif on Tuesday said she has tested positive for COVID-19 and is under home quarantine.

Kaif, 37, took to her Instagram Story and requested those who came in contact with her to also get themselves tested.

The "Bharat" star said she is currently following protocols listed by her doctors and thanked fans for their continued support.

"I have tested positive for Covid-19. Have immediately isolated myself and will be under home quarantine. I'm following all safety protocols under the advice of my doctors.

"Requesting everyone who came in contact with me to get tested immediately too. Grateful for all your love and support.

Please stay safe and take care," Kaif wrote.

The actor is the latest Bollywood celebrity to have contracted the virus after superstar Akshay Kumar, Aamir Khan, Govinda, Alia Bhatt, R Madhavan, singer Aditya Narayan, among others.

Earlier in the day, comic Kunal Kamra also tested COVID-19 positive, along with his partners.

Yesterday, actors Vicky Kaushal and Bhumi Pednekar also tested positive for COVID-19. The duo were shooting Karan Johar-backed upcoming film "Mr Lele" in the city.

On Monday, Mumbai reported 9,857 new cases of the infection, taking its tally to 4,62,302, as per the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation.

ARIES:

Aries, when you mean business, you mean business—and there's nobody who can deter you from achieving what you have set out to do. Here's the thing, though: you cannot achieve it all on your own. You will need the support of your fellow warriors in order to get to the desired destination. It all comes down to how you will convey your truth to them. Yes, there is a way to be firm without sounding like you're attacking others, and that is something you are about to figure out now.

TAURUS:

The passage of tide and time transforms everything—and that includes some of our closest ties. Wednesday finds you reminiscing about the relationships that have changed unknowingly, and wishing you could get your hands on a time machine. While the past cannot be re-lived (or rewritten), the now continues to be in our hands. The real question is: what will you do "today" in order to bridge the gap?

GEMINI:

Here's the thing, Gemini: your troubles aren't going to solve themselves. You need to tackle them head on. But, that doesn't mean you have to go to war with others in order to prove your point. Choose the path of gentle-

ness. Find a way to get along. What you will discover in the process is that it's not that hard to find middle ground.

CANCER:

That vision board looks fantastic, Cancer, but, it isn't going to manifest itself! This phase of your life is about taking inspired action and believing in yourself in a way you never have before. When in doubt, ponder over Elizabeth Gilbert's words (from her bestseller Big Magic): "Do you have the courage? Do you have the courage to bring forth this work? The treasures that are hidden inside you are hoping you will say yes."

LEO:

Here's the thing, honey: you've been sold a lie. The lie that you are separate from all of Creation. That you're limited in so many ways. But, the truth is, you are Source. You are an extension of the Divine Consciousness in human form, and you don't need any special tools or techniques to remember this truth. Open your eyes, beloved. Remember who you are and know that this remembrance will change the course of your life.

VIRGO:

Today, you're looking into the rearview mirror and reminiscing over everything that transpired over the past year or so—the good,

bad, and the ugly. Let's be honest, there's a lot you would have rather skipped. However, you understand that a force larger than yourself was at play here, one that wanted you to awaken to your truth and liberate yourself from all that is false within and without. Where you are today is a beautiful place. You have complete clarity on where you need to go and what steps you need to take in order to arrive at the given destination.

LIBRA:

What a long way you have come, Libra! The road that you have taken has been full of trials and tribulations—yet, you wouldn't change what transpired in the past for a thing. It has, after all, made you the person you are today and helped you let go of all that is false. The time to move yet again has come, and quite literally for some of you. The real question is: are you ready to bridge the gap between where you are and where you need to be?

SCORPIO:

Scorpio, you've been down this road before, where you said yes to everything that came your way and took on more responsibility than you were willing to handle—and the thing about this road is that it leads to feeling overwhelmed. But, it's not too late now,

is it? You still have the chance to unburden yourself and ask the right people for help and assistance. PS: listen to what your higher self is telling you in this moment.

SAGITTARIUS:

You could do it all on your own, but where's the fun in that? The cards are making you aware of the fellow warriors who want to walk this path with you. It's time to make the right associations, Sagittarius. Those who are already in a collaborative space are being reminded that it's not that hard to get along. Adopt 'patience' as your power word, my loves. The more you practice active listening, the easier it will be for you to find solutions.

CAPRICORN:

While the waxing moon is synonymous with birth and beginnings, the waxing cycle inspires us to release that which is no longer in alignment with our truth. Take a moment to look within and ask yourself, "What do I need to let go of?" A simple journaling exercise will help you find the answers you're looking for. This could also be a time of emotional upheaval. You may be feeling like somebody is concealing facts from you. Trust what your instinct is telling you, but don't expect things to sort themselves

out immediately.

AQUARIUS:

Take a moment to look within. Ask yourself what is the roadblock between where you are and where you need to be. Something tells us that impostor's syndrome is showing up strongly. What the cards are urging you to do today: say a 'yes' for every 'no'. Make a list of reasons why you do not believe you are worthy of realising a certain dream. Then, strike each one of them out as you write something positive about yourself down below.

PISCES:

Philosopher Alan Watts once said, "No one is more dangerously insane than one who is sane all the time: he is like a steel bridge without flexibility, and the order of his life is rigid and brittle." Your thoughts exactly, Pisces. Where you are is a time of great change. A time of letting go of the old. A time of allowing yourself to be transformed. You may or may not have complete clarity about where you are being led to, and that's okay. Hold onto the intention of 'selfless service' and know that the winds will take you where you need to go at this moment.